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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon today announced grants totaling \$9.5 million for Head Start projects in St. Bernard, Plaquemines, and St. Mary Parishes issued by the U.S. Department of Health Human Services. The funding will enable local Head Start programs to provide key services for children and parents displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and help build new facilities in areas damaged by the storms. Head Start serves children under the age of five and their families, providing a range of individualized services including preschool education and information for parents about early childhood development, health, nutrition, and parenting skills.

"Head Start meets an urgent need in our communities by providing a safe place for children to play and learn while their parents are working," said Melancon. "These grants are an important investment in our children's future."

St. Bernard Parish School Board will use their \$1 million grant to construct a new pre-Kindergarten facility in Chalmette to replace the FEMA trailers currently being used by over 300 children. Dr. Charlie Raviotta, Supervisor of St. Bernard Parish Preschool Programs, said, "Because of the Katrina, there's only one daycare operating in the parish so there's no place for kids to go. Our facilities were completely wiped out."

"Head Start has been wonderful to us," added Dr. Raviotta. "They kept our funding when we were struggling to get back together last year and now are helping us rebuild."

Plaquemines Parish School Board plans to use its \$3.5 million grant to build a new state-of-the-art Head Start facility in Belle Chasse with six classrooms, office space, a playground and a parent center. The new facility, accommodating 100 children, will be located near the Belle Chasse Primary School.

"After Katrina, a lot of residents from Plaquemines moved to the Belle Chasse area," noted Cheryl Picou, Project Director for Plaquemines Parish Head Start. "Many of these families are

still living in FEMA trailers or in homes with other families." She added that since Katrina, the number of families qualifying for Head Start in the area has grown significantly.

The St. Mary Community Action Agency will use their \$5 million grant to build five new Head Start facilities, serving 376 children in St. Mary's and Vermilion Parishes, to replace those destroyed by the hurricane. Almetra Franklin, CEO of St. Mary Community Action Head Start, said their agency has had to get a waiver to temporarily increase the capacity of their current facilities in order to have a place for all the children they serve.

Franklin attests to the impact of the program in the community: "One of the things I've seen is more parents being empowered to work on their own behalf. After a Head Start parenting class, one parent purchased a home. Now her children are in school, and she is looking for parents like herself and helping them to get connected to the agency."

The project period for all three grants runs from September 1, 2006, through August 31, 2009.

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